

*Kishore N. Kilgadi*

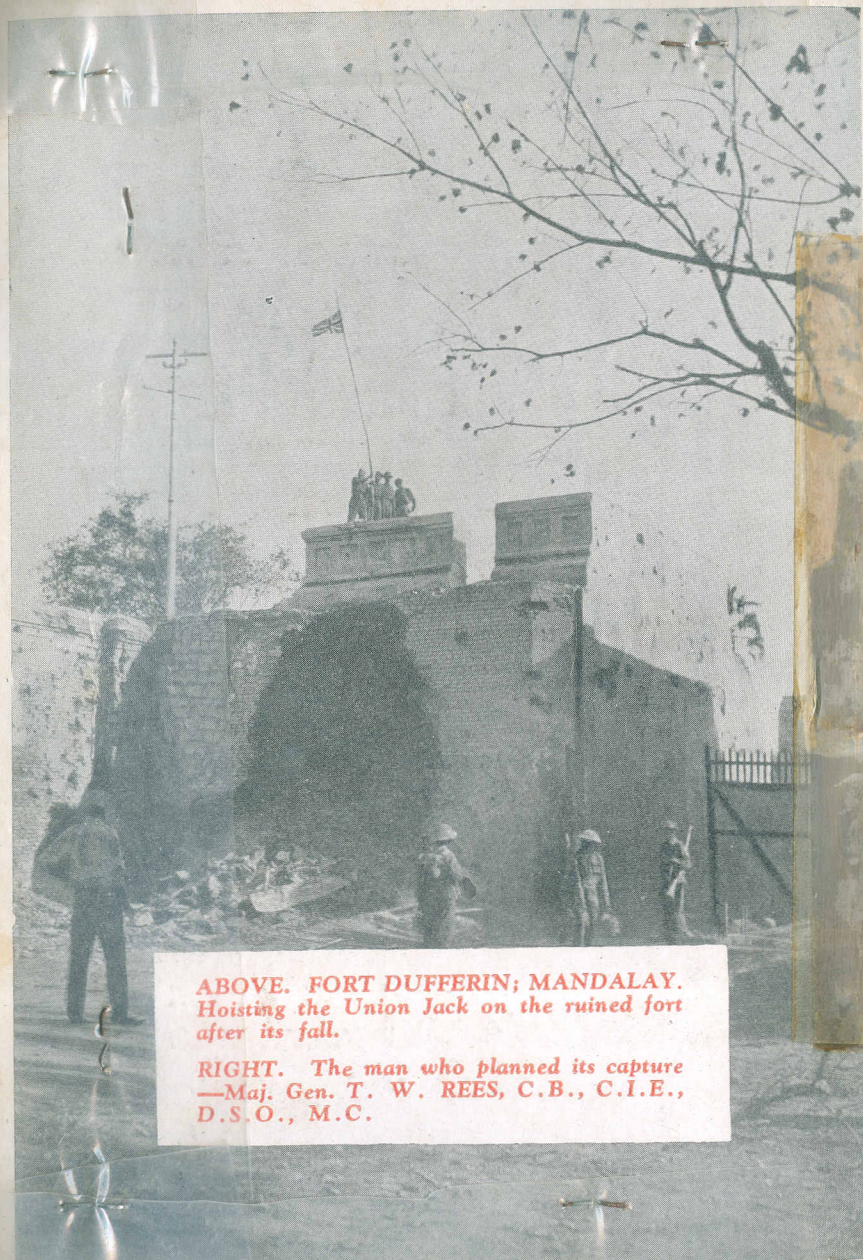
# DAGGER DIVISION



Story of the  
19th Indian Division.



## DIVISIONAL COMMANDER



**ABOVE. FORT DUFFERIN; MANDALAY.**  
Hoisting the Union Jack on the ruined fort  
after its fall.

**RIGHT. The man who planned its capture**  
—Maj. Gen. T. W. REES, C.B., C.I.E.,  
D.S.O., M.C.





## BRIGADE COMMANDERS

Commander 62nd Indian Infantry Brigade—  
Brig. J. R. MORRIS,  
D.S.O.



Commanders 64th Indian Infantry Brigade.  
November 1944 to  
February 1945, Brig. A.  
G. BAIN. From February  
1945, Brig. J. G.  
FLEWETT, D.S.O.,  
(Left of photograph).



Commander 98th Indian Infantry Brigade.  
Brig. C. I. JERRARD.







INDIAN  
PROVOST  
CORPS



INTELLIGENCE  
CORPS



WELCH  
REGIMENT



6th  
RAJPUTANA  
RIFLES



INDIAN ARMY  
ORDNANCE  
CORPS



INDIAN  
ELECTRICAL  
AND  
MECHANICAL  
ENGINEERS



INDIAN ARMY  
MEDICAL  
CORPS



ROYAL  
INDIAN ARMY  
SERVICE CORPS



ROYAL BOMBAY

## ORDER OF BATTLE

### INFANTRY

#### 62nd Indian Infantry Brigade.

2nd Battalion Welch Regt. 3/6th Rajputana Rifles. 4/6th Gurkha Rifles.

#### 64th Indian Infantry Brigade.

2nd Battalion Worcestershire Regt. 5/10th Baluch Regt. 1/6th Gurkha Rifles.

#### 98th Indian Infantry Brigade.

2nd Battalion The Royal Berkshire Regt. 8/12th Frontier Force Regt. 4/4th Gurkha Rifles.

### DIVISIONAL CAVALRY

7th Cavalry (replaced by 8th Cavalry on 1st April 1945).

### MACHINE GUN BATTALION.

11th Sikh Machine Gun Battalion.

### DIVISIONAL RECONNAISSANCE BATTALION

1/15th Punjab Regt.

### DIVISIONAL H.Q. DEFENCE BATTALION.

1st Assam Regt.

### ARTILLERY.

#### Divisional Artillery Units.

115th Field Regt. R.A. 4th Indian Field Regt. (replaced 28th Field Regt. R.A. in January 1945). 20th Indian Mountain Regt. 33rd Anti-Tank Regt. R.A.

#### Units under command.

18th Field Regt. R.A. (S.P.) 134th Field Regt. R.A. 63/87th Medium Battery R.A. 5th Indian Field Regt. 44th L.A.A. Regt. R.A. 101st H.A.A. Regt. R.A. 5th Indian H.A.A. Regt. Detachments 1st British Survey Unit. Detachments 605th Air O.P. Squadron.

### ENGINEERS.

#### Divisional Engineer Units.

29th (Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners) Indian Field Company I.E. 64th and 65th (Queen Victoria's Own Madras Sappers and Miners) Indian Field Companies, I.E. 327th (Q.V.O. Madras) Indian Field Park Company I.E.

#### Units under command.

431st (Q.V.O. Madras) Indian Field Company I.E. 2nd Faridkot Field Company. Indian States Forces. 9th (Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners) Indian Bridging Platoon, I.E.

### ROYAL INDIAN ARMY SERVICE CORPS.

#### Divisional Units.

10th, 52nd and 60th Indian 'A' Transport Companies (Mule) 124th and 129th Mechanical Transport Companies (Divisional Transport). 25th, 26th, 27th and 28th Indian Composite Platoons.

#### Units under command.

One platoon 164th Company (G.T.). One platoon DUKWS Company R.A.S.C. 10th and 23rd Field Ambulance Troops.

### MEDICAL.

#### Divisional Units.

51st, 52nd and 53rd Indian Field Ambulances. 31st Indian Field Hygiene Section. 45th Indian Anti-Malarial Unit.

#### Units under command.

Detachments from American Field Service.

### INDIAN ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL ENGINEERS.

43rd, 57th and 68th Indian Infantry Workshop Companies. Divisional Re-

## Summary of Approved HONOURS and AWARDS made to the Division up to 14th August 1945.

AWARD	TOTAL
D.S.O. ...	4
Bar to D.S.O. ...	1
I.O.M. ...	1
M.C. ...	42
D.C.M. ...	2
I.D.S.M. ...	5
M.M. ...	67
HONOUR	
C.B. ...	1
O.B.E. ...	2
M.B.E. ...	4

covery Companies. 1030th and 1032nd Indian Transport Workshop Sections. Light Aid Detachments.

### MISCELLANEOUS

Ordnance. 119th Indian Ordnance Sub Park. C.M.P. Divisional Provost Unit. Transport. Divisional Transport Section. Intelligence Corps.

#### Under Command.

603rd Field Security Section. 6th Platoon Burma Intelligence Corps.



6th  
GURKHA  
RIFLES



WORCESTERSHIRE  
REGIMENT



10th  
BALUCH  
REGIMENT



ROYAL  
BERKSHIRE  
REGIMENT



12th FRONTIER





ROYAL BOMBAY  
SAPPERS AND  
MINERS



FARIDKOT  
FIELD  
COMPANY



Q.V.O. MADRAS  
SAPPERS AND  
MINERS



INDIAN  
ARTILLERY

Battery R.A. 5th Indian Field Regt.  
44th L.A.A. Regt. R.A. 101st H.A.A. Regt.  
Regt. R.A. 5th Indian H.A.A. Regt.  
Detachments 1st British Survey Unit.  
Detachments 605th Air O.P. Squadron.

INDIAN ELECTRICAL AND  
MECHANICAL ENGINEERS.

43rd, 57th and 68th Indian Infantry  
Workshop Companies. Divisional Re-

Under Command.

603rd Field Security Section. 6th  
Platoon Burma Intelligence Corps.



12th FRONTIER  
FORCE  
REGIMENT



4th  
GURKHA  
RIFLES



7th  
CAVALRY



8th  
CAVALRY

## BATTLE CASUALTIES

UNIT	KILLED				WOUNDED				MISSING		
	Offrs.	VCOs.	BORs.	IO Rs & NCEs	Offrs.	VCOs.	BORs.	IO Rs & NCEs	Offrs.	BORs.	IO Rs & NCEs
2 Welch	7	-	69	...	10	...	230	...	...	9	...
3/6 Raj Rif	1	1	...	80	7	13	...	430	...	...	1
4/6 G. R.	2	2	...	82	6	10	...	309	...	...	2
2 Worcs	4	...	44	1	15	...	192	1	...	4	...
5/10 Baluch	1	5	...	80	3	8	...	336	...	...	4
1/6 G. R.	2	3	...	94	5	7	...	285	...	...	4
2 R Berks	6	...	75	...	16	...	288	...	2	11	...
8/12 F. F. R.	2	2	...	62	5	9	...	299	...	...	3
4/4 G. R.	2	...	...	54	3	7	...	264	...	...	2
MG Bn 11 Sikhs	1	1	...	32	5	2	...	105	...	...	9
1/15 Punjab	1	4	...	28	1	5	...	138	...	...	4
1 Assam	1	...	...	19	...	1	...	50	...	...	14
115 Fd. Regt.	2	...	11	...	8	...	36	...	...	...	...
20 Mtn Regt.	1	...	...	9	2	...	...	26	...	...	1
4 Ind Fd Regt.	5	...	...	21	6	...	...	25	...	...	...
33 A/T Regt.	...	...	2	...	3	...	38	...	...	...	...
RE Units	1	3	...	20	3	1	...	78	...	...	...
S & T Units	...	2	...	25	2	4	...	107	...	...	4
Med Units	2	...	...	3	1	...	...	13	...	...	...
Sigs Units	1	...	...	4	...	1	...	20	...	...	...
8 Cav	1	...	...	5	...	...	...	17	1	...	2
Div HQ	3	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
F. P. O.	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	2	...	...	...
Other Div. Tps	2	...	...	7	...	2	...	81	...	...	...

ROYAL  
ARTILLERY



1st  
ASSAM  
REGIMENT

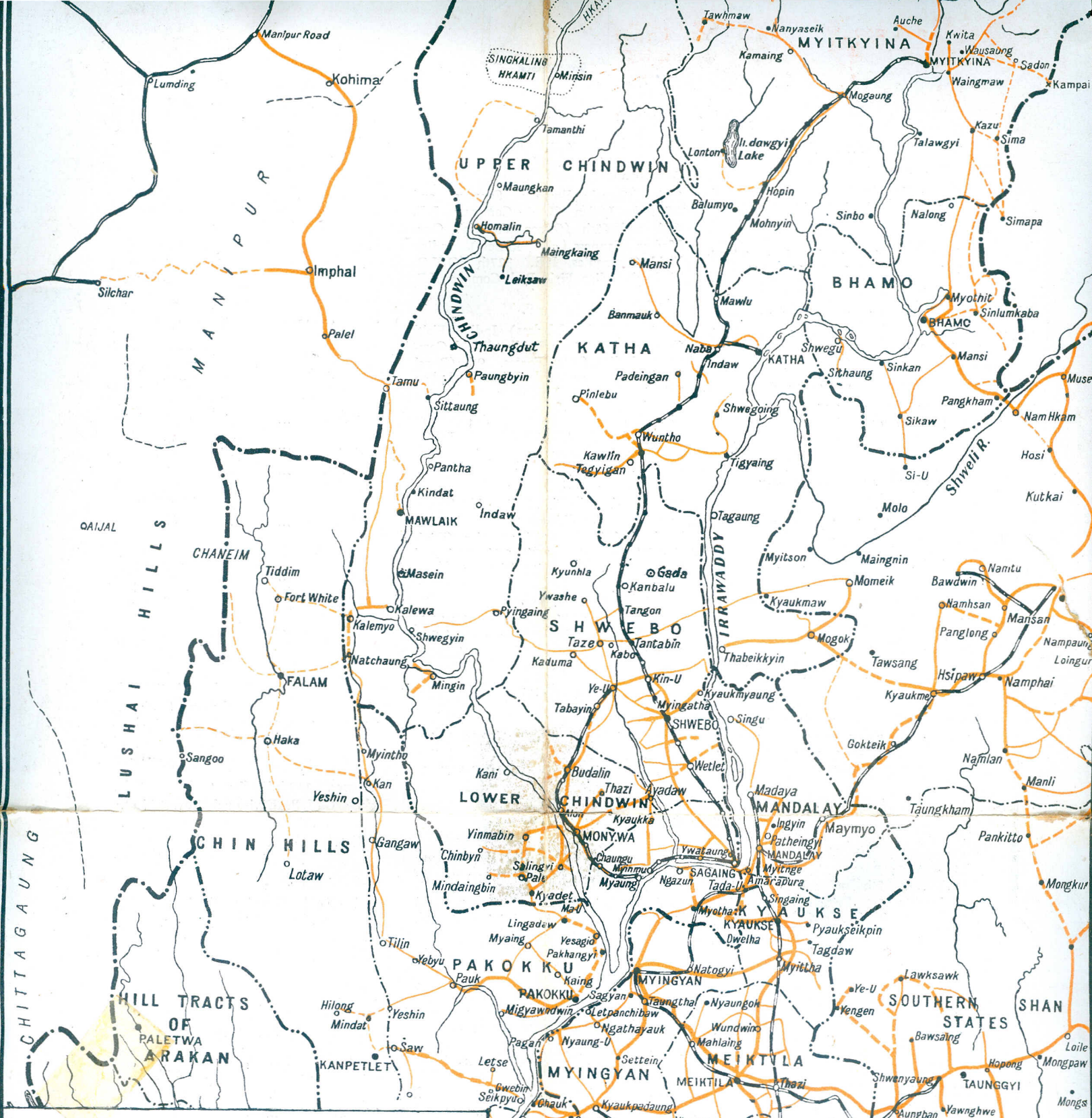


15th  
PUNJAB  
REGIMENT



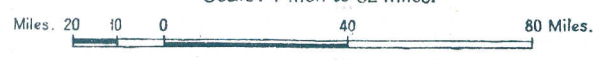
11th SIKH  
REGIMENT





# MAP OF BURMA showing Divisions and Districts.

Scale: 1 Inch to 32 Miles.



## REFERENCES.

- International Boundary.....
- Divisional Boundary.....
- District Boundary.....
- District Headquarters.....● KATHA
- Principal Towns.....○ Pyinmana
- Railways completed with stations.....
- Metalled Roads.....
- Surfaced Roads.....
- Unsurfaced Roads.....
- Mule Roads and Bridle Paths.....





SINGU ON THE IRRAWADDY

## DAGGER DIVISION

### *Introduction*

**T**O THE 19TH INDIAN ("DAGGER") DIVISION of Maj. Gen. T. Wynford Rees went the signal honour of first raising the Union Jack over Mandalay's Fort Dufferin. and symbolising by the capture of this ancient town on the banks of the Irrawaddy, the breaking of the Japanese Armies on their last natural line of defence in Burma.

But though the Division's name will always live on the chronicles of the Far Eastern War for this historic victory, the contribution of Gen. Rees' men to the defeat of the enemy has been far greater than is signified by this achievement alone.

For the battle of Mandalay was won not on the outskirts of the city itself but 45 miles to the north on the bridgehead at Kyaukmyaung. And it was here that the Division made its vital contribution to the whole battle of the Irrawaddy.

First Fourteenth Army troops to breach the enemy defence line and set foot on the Japanese-held far bank of the



river, in mid-January of 1945, were men of the "Dagger" Division.

For twenty days and twenty nights the battle of the bridgehead raged with Indian, Gurkha and British infantry facing consistent violent and desperate counter-attack and artillery bombardment from the heaviest concentration of enemy artillery seen in the Burma War.

The names of Pear Hill and Minban Taung, the two vital tactical features on the eastern bank, seized by General Rees at the outset of the battle, symbolise the finest hour of the fighting men of the "Dagger" Division, infantry, gunners, sappers and services alike. To their precious foothold they clung with a tenacity sustained by a high courage and determination hardly equalled in the history of the war in Burma.

They were fighting a vital battle. Failure to hold this ground would have dislocated the whole of the Fourteenth Army plan for the breaching of the Irrawaddy line.

For the enemy had been skilfully deceived into believing that the whole of Lt.-Gen. Frank Messervy's Fourth Corps was across the Chindwin, that the 19th Indian Division was its spearhead, and that the great assault on the Irrawaddy line was to develop primarily along the eastern bank north of Mandalay, in conjunction with the 36th British Division and other forces moving south from the northern combat area.

Hence the plan aimed at drawing off from Mandalay the first severe effort of the Japanese 15th Army command to contain our offensive. It succeeded. The men of the "Dagger" Division did not fail.

The battle of the Kyaukmyaung bridgehead cost the enemy in killed alone at least 2,000 men, great expenditure of artillery, ammunition and supplies, great loss of war material—and more—their preoccupation with this battle ultimately cost them Burma itself.

No Division in the Burma war has made such a dramatic entry on to the fateful stage of battle. And no Division has sustained its heroic part so boldly in the enfolding drama of the liberation of Burma and the infliction of the most severe defeat on their land forces ever suffered by the Japanese in the Far Eastern war.

For three years in India, the Division was schooled for its part. Raised in late 1941, it shared with the 25th Indian Division the vital task of defending southern India during 1942 when the Japanese occupation of Burma and the massing of the invader's sea and air power threatened our war base.



*Maj. Gen. REES (centre) and some of his men after hoisting the flag on Fort Dufferin.*



During 1943 and 1944 it underwent frequent transformation as battle experience taught us new lessons on the organisation and training of fighting formations for the Far East. When it went into battle it was the first "Standard" Indian Division—an establishment which was the latest expert answer on organisation.

First commander of the Division in 1941 was Brigadier J. G. Smyth, V.C. whose wife devised the "Dagger" Divisional sign which was to become known all over the world as the symbol of the men who fought on the road to Mandalay.

Its order of battle in the winter of 1944 was impressive. It contained three regular British battalions—the Royal Berkshire, the Worcesters and the Welch—Indian battalions from regiments as famous as the 6th Rajputana Rifles, the



**GUNNERS in action near Mandalay Hill.**



**PATHAN SIGNALMAN—Toungoo-Mawchi road.**

10th Baluch, the 15th Punjab, the 12th Frontier Force and two battalions of the 6th Gurkha Rifles—General Slim's regiment—and one battalion of the 4th Gurkha Rifles. Its machine-gun battalion was from the 11th Sikhs and its artillery included British and Indian field gunners—the latter a mixed regiment of Mahrattas, Madrassis and Punjabis—British anti-tank gunners, Madras and Bombay sappers and miners, British and Indian signallers, Indian field ambulances and supply ordnance and I.E.M.E. personnel from all parts of India.

Its commander was a short stocky Welshman—Barry-born son of a clergyman—Maj. Gen. T. Wynford Rees, a non-drinker and a non-smoker, a brilliant tactician and a real leader of men with dash and personal courage of such a high order that it was an embarrassment to his loyal staff.



**MEDICAL SERVICES organize the evacuation of wounded from Pear Hill by carrier.**



To his men Gen. Rees became known as "Pete"—to his Welsh troops, "the Docker"—in the Fourteenth Army, "Napoleon". To his Indian troops he was the "General Sahib Bahadur"—and never was the title "Bahadur" better earned.

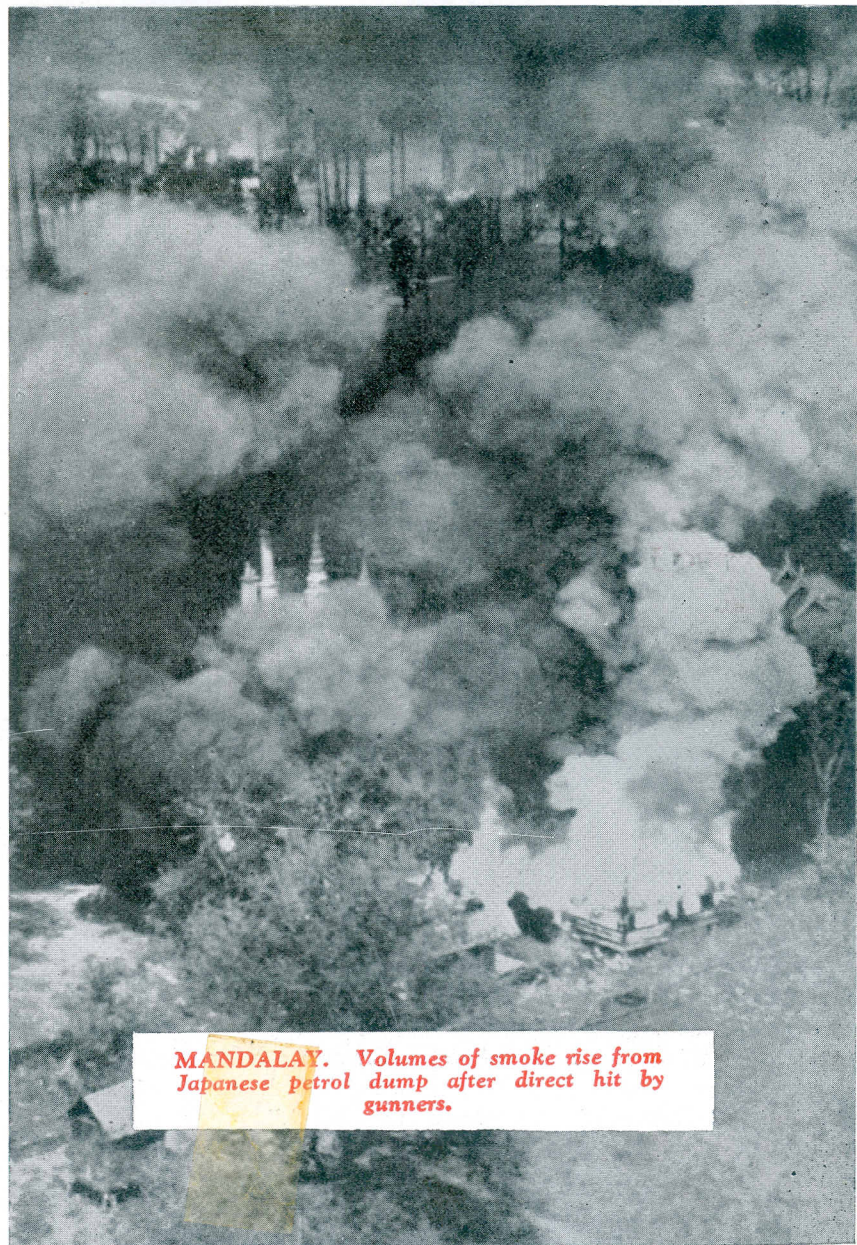
In Burma during the winter of 1944 the Fourteenth Army pursuit of the broken remnants of the Japanese "Invade India" army was drawing to its close, when the 19th Division was called into battle.



**GURKHA** carrying full kit crosses the Irrawaddy.



**Madras Sappers & Miners** open gates of Fort Dufferin.



**MANDALAY.** Volumes of smoke rise from Japanese petrol dump after direct hit by gunners.





CROSSING THE CHINDWIN

### Part I.—The Water Barriers.

**T**HE JAPANESE ARMY, so severely mauled in the battles of the spring and summer of 1944, and decimated by sickness and starvation, could not hold the line of the Chindwin. The Japanese High Command decided to stake all on the battle of the Irrawaddy as the decisive action which would decide the possession of Burma.

The way was open then for a whirlwind dash into the heart of Central Burma and east and south to the banks of the Irrawaddy. What Division could better be chosen for this role than the 19th Division—equipped and trained to the best available finality, comprising fit, fresh troops eager to get to grips with the enemy and led by a General whose temperament was ideally suited to his task? Once across the Chindwin, the Division was to act as a long range penetration group—a self-contained fighting force, supplied by air, making its own routes across country and leaving no line of communication open in the rear. What Japs were encountered *en route* were to be liquidated with expedition. The watchword was “Pursue the enemy.”

The Division was faced by some of the worst campaigning country in the world. Across their line of advance towards the banks of the Irrawaddy lay corrugations of wild evergreen, jungle-clad mountain ranges, the Mu and the Maze rivers, and hundreds of steep-sided chaungs. Rising 3,000 feet before them too lay the mighty Zibyu Taungdanha, known as the “Range of the Wild Gooseberry Trees”—a formidable mountain obstacle which formed the natural barrier between the Chindwin and the Mu rivers.

In November 1944 on boats and rafts the Division with more than a thousand vehicles and all its guns, slipped across the Chindwin at Sittaung in two columns. The drive was on.

Gen. Rees split his Division into two. One column was to capture the road junction of Pinlebu close to the North Burma railway, the second was to link up with the 36th British Division operating in the railway corridor.

The first column, led by an ex-Chindit brigadier sliced their way over 150 miles of tangled mountain ridges in a fortnight's fighting and hard marching to enter Pinlebu on December '16—exactly a month and a day after the first crossing of the Chindwin.

Sometimes the razor-backed ridges dropped sheer 800 feet into narrow valleys and even mules had to be off-loaded and their loads manhandled. On one occasion the mules were lowered down a cliff face by ropes.

The column relied solely on air supply—the only available dropping areas in this tangled country being miniature plateaus often not much larger than tennis courts.

The strictest secrecy veiled the march of this column. No lights were allowed after dusk, and parachutes which draped the stately teak trees with banners of white which would



mark the path of our column were either burnt or the trees blown on which they hung.

In the first week, the Rajputana Rifles in their first engagements killed a hundred of the enemy. First with light machine-gun nests and later with medium machine-guns, the Japs tried to stem our advance. Gurkhas and Rajrif had short-lived struggles to capture bunker defences, showing in these early clashes a mastery of jungle warfare.

But whilst the opposition often had great determination the Jap was still on the retreat and could only hope to fight delaying actions. After the first week the only limitation of the progress of our column was its ability to cover the ground.

Madras Sappers with charred teak stilts from ruined houses threw a bridge over the 40-yard wide river Mu in three hours, and General Rees crossed the river into Pinlebu to meet his troops, when our troops celebrated its capture by having a nautch and sing-song round huge bonfires—the first lights for a month. Pinlebu was entered on the 16th December.

The town itself was a ruin pitted with bomb craters, and the graveyard of many hundred Japs who had been caught in the strategic air force strikes of the previous two months. Only the tiny concrete jail was intact.

But despite its battered condition it was a useful communications centre, affording a motorable road from Thaungdut on the Chindwin to Wuntho on the northern edge of the Central Burma plain.

Meanwhile the other column, after a march of 150 miles, rafting itself across the Chindwin, and engineering a road as it went, reached Banmauk on December 18th to link up with patrols of the Royal Scots Fusiliers from the 36th British Division.

Ahead of this column went sappers who hacked a road through the jungle and on sandstone cliffs. At one point from a sheer cliff face they built out a timber platform and laid a road on it. Infantry, gunners, and all arms and all services lent a hand in the job of road making.

After a few skirmishes near the Chindwin, the Japs withdrew from in front of this column, and until the railway corridor was reached the only shots fired were by the men who supplemented their air-supplied rations with game from the virgin jungle.

The march of this part of the Division, although it had not involved heavy fighting up to this stage, was a victory. For the link up with 36th Division sealed off the whole of North Burma to the enemy. An area twice the size of Ireland with 2,000 inhabited localities had been liberated. The tide of the Allied advance was rolling down in Central Burma. The re-occupation of the country had begun.

For the Nagas, Kachins, Shans and Burmans living in the hundreds of scattered villages in the liberated territory, a new life of peace began. Many of them had for two years been living in jungle clearings, sowing small crops and making their own cloth in order to escape the oppression, pillaging and forced labour demands of the Japs. Civil Affairs Officers brought supplies and medicines for the impoverished villagers who, bartering fresh supplies, gave our troops a warm welcome.

Everywhere in this area there were signs of well prepared enemy positions which had been evacuated as the double threat from north and east of the Allied advance developed.

The 36th British Division entered Indaw and Katha on the Mandalay-Myitkyina railway, and joining hands with the



36th Division at Indaw the "Dagger" Division's two easterly columns joined up south of Wuntho and Katha. The first stage was over. We were ready now to move down into the Central Burma plain.

Even at this early stage there was considerable disorganisation amongst the enemy, and small parties of stragglers completely bewildered at seeing our troops so far south fell into our hands as prisoners or were shot up.

For the first time the troops saw the beginnings of the flat open paddy land which was to be the battleground for the liberation of Burma. The mountainous jungles of the Indo Burma border had been fought through and left behind.

The Fourteenth Army plan for the clearance of the Japanese north of the Irrawaddy became clear. The 2nd British Division had also crossed the Chindwin and was making a hook on Shwebo, the main communications centre and "capital" of the Dry Zone area north of Mandalay.

The "Dagger" Division's part in the plan was to drive on Shwebo from the North. This was to be the first big engagement in which the bulk of the Division's infantry and artillery would be deployed together for battle.

The first set-piece battle was at Leiktu, north of Kanbalu, the gateway to the plain, and forty miles north of Shwebo. Here the Japanese prepared to make a stand, entrenched with light and medium machine-guns, mortars and artillery.

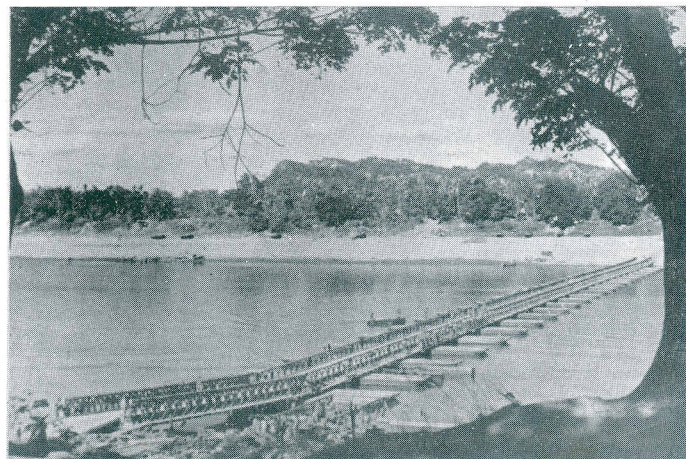
The battle lasted five days. And in its first action the Division showed early signs of the aggressiveness of its infantry, the camaraderie between Indian and British troops, and the co-operation and support of the gunners, which was to signalise the Division's later and more decisive battles.

The Royal Berks, the 4th Gurkha Rifles, and the 12th Frontier Force Regiment took part in this battle. The

Indian field regiment celebrated the third anniversary of its formation by going into action for the first time.

High lights of the battle were when a company of the Royal Berks was isolated and their "sathis" from the 4th Gurkhas volunteered to run the gauntlet of sniper-infested woodland to get their rations to them. Soon afterwards the British battalion repayed this service by manhandling stores for the Gurkhas when they found themselves out of reach of the road supply line after penetrating the Jap defences. This camaraderie and good fellowship existing between Indian and British troops was always amply evident in the Division throughout the campaign.

Ambulances evacuating the wounded at one stage could not be started without attracting small arms fire and had



**THE CHINDWIN.** This Bailey Bridge built by Sappers was one of the largest ever constructed.



to be silently manhandled from the perimeter when the drivers were told to "switch on and go like hell."

With their defences battered by the gunners and penetrated by the infantry of the 19th Division, and virtually surrounded, the Jap defenders gave way and the road was open for the advance on Shwebo.

Still Japanese suicide parties attempted to delay our advance, paying a heavy cost in lives. Between Kanbalu and Shwebo almost every fifth milestone had its engagement of a few hours duration.

In this advance, the Rajrif with a considerable score of Jap dead to their credit in the first action of the march from the Chindwin to Pinlebu, were again to the fore.

On one occasion they moved so fast that they occupied a strongly bunkered position before the enemy could reach it and faced stiff counter attacks in a three day battle. At Pinde, with the Welch, they slaughtered 20 of a party of 50 Japs in a chuang. At Gada, 400 Japs were driven from a strong position which had been plastered by Hurri-bombers and mortar fire.

On January 4th 1945 the guns of the 2nd British Division pressing on Shwebo could be heard, and five days later, the 10th Baluch had fought their way into the outskirts of the town.

While the 2nd Division closed a ring round the town, the "Dagger" Division screened the roads leading east to the Irrawaddy and south to Mandalay.

For several days the 19th Division's artillery pounded the enemy's delaying parties and pushed them closer and closer towards the town until they had to make their last fight in foxholes in the streets.

The Baluch battalion hooked round the enemy's right

flanks and pushed into Shwebo to begin mopping up the suicide parties covering the cross roads between the cantonment and the town itself.

At the same time the 6th Gurkha Rifles were moving round to the southern road and caught the Japs unawares as they tried to escape from the town before the assault of the British troops came in.

Ten miles to the north, the 4th Gurkhas with a British Battalion, formed a northern column which fought a brisk battle at the Kinu cross roads. When their British comrades were held up, the Gurkhas put in a hook to the rear of the Jap position. The joint attack went in from front and rear and the Japs pulling out during the night were ambushed by the Gurkhas, bringing their losses in this two-day battle to more than 50 men killed.

The Division had now covered 400 miles to reach Shwebo and fought two major and many minor actions on the way. Many of the infantrymen had marched upwards of 500 miles and the muleteers carrying out their constant work of supplying the troops had covered more than 600 miles. The Services, Medical, R.I. A. S.C. and I.E. M.E. had gone "flat-out" to produce this result.

Sick and wounded had been evacuated from light air strips built by the sappers whose record achievement was five strips in ten days. In addition the sappers had had to deal for the first time with mines and booby traps.

The gunners had been in co-ordinated action with the infantry, and the most complete confidence existed between the two arms. The infantry themselves were confident and in good heart. The "Dagger" Division was ready for its biggest battle and was on the road to Mandalay.

Within 24 hours of the fall of Shwebo, Gen. Rees had sent patrols across the Irrawaddy 20 miles to the east to locate



suitable crossing places. The watchword was still "pursue the enemy."

With the capture of Shwebo, the key point of the Dry Zone was in our hands and the Fourteenth Army plan for the next stage of the offensive began to take shape.

To the west the 20th Indian Division was moving on Monywa, the Chindwin river port, and pressing towards the banks of the Irrawaddy west of Mandalay. Further west in the Myitta Valley, Gangaw had fallen and the concentration of Fourth Corps was beginning which would terminate in the Pagan bridgehead of 7th Indian Division, and the 17th Indian Division armoured and motorised drive on Meiktila. The 2nd British Division was free to continue the drive due south towards the Irrawaddy in the direction of Mandalay itself. The stage was set for the battle of the Irrawaddy. It was the "Dagger" Division which was to make the first entrance and play the first important role.

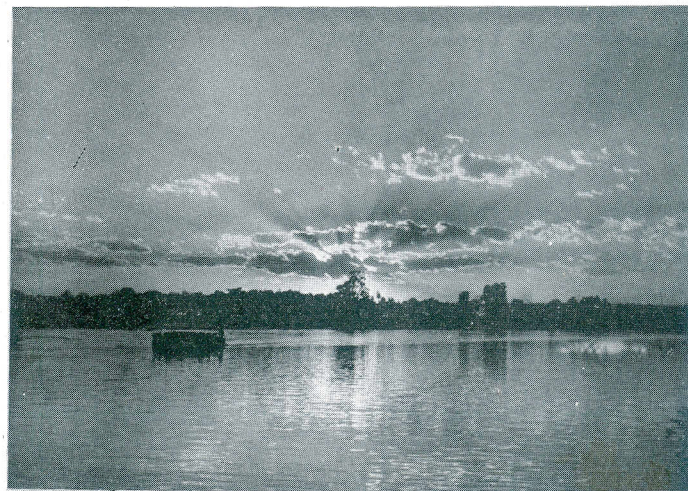
Several reconnaissance patrols were sent across the river at night—the first over the river were men of the Welch at Thabeikkyin on the night of the 9th January: and these patrols not only brought back the information required for the crossings, but also kept the Japs guessing as to the places at which the British would make their landings. Eventually preparations were complete.

In rubber assault boats men of the "Dagger" Division effected their first lodgement across the 600 yard wide Irrawaddy on the night of January 14th and within five days the 15th Punjab leading, followed by the 10th Baluch had established a bridgehead at Kyaukmyaung, forty-six miles north of Mandalay on the east bank of the river. Twenty miles further north at Thabeikkyin, the 4th Gurkha Rifles had established another bridgehead as a diversion, and they and the Frontier Force Regiment maintained their positions

against fierce Japanese counter-attacks. The intention was that the enemy should read into this northern bridgehead a plan to link up with the 36th British Division then moving southwards.

It was a complex situation. In the rapid advance south to Shwebo, and on to the banks of the Irrawaddy, large pockets of Japanese had been left west of the river. The escape routes of these enemy parties were blocked south of Shwebo and also across the river. While our troops on the eastern bank held on to their bridgehead, fierce local actions raged too on the Shwebo side as the enemy tried to get back across the river.

The Japanese reaction to the bridgehead was quick and violent. Supported by aircraft, artillery, and mortars they



Sunset on the Irrawaddy River. Raft is to be seen in the left foreground.



made a series of determined attempts in the first days of the bridgehead to drive the "Dagger" Division back across the river. In the first two days of the bridgehead fighting Jap casualties were upwards of 200 and Jap bodies drifting down the Irrawaddy were the first witness of the fruitless sacrifice that the enemy was to make here during the coming weeks in an effort to break the hold of Gen. Rees' men.

The bridgehead was but a slender handhold—a quarter of a mile in length along the eastern bank. Besides this we quickly seized and held the two vital tactical features, Minban Taung ridge, a finger of scrub-covered rock 800 feet high three miles inland of Kyaukmyaung, and Pear Hill, a bare barren peak rising sharply from the bank of the river two and a half miles south of the main bridgehead. These were the key observation points in the sector, and deprived of them the Jap artillery was blind.

Further north at Thabeikkyin the enemy had reacted to the second bridgehead by throwing in immediate counter-attacks, and Gurkhas there had to face assault charges reminiscent of old time war led by Japanese officers waving their swords.

Halfway between the two bridgeheads on the Shwebo side of the river in the village of Kabwet was a large Jap pocket in strong bunker positions. For 74 hours here the Division's machine-gun battalion of the 11th Sikhs was besieged and counter-attacked. The enemy's first night casualties were sixty dead many of whom were picked up from under the muzzles of the Vickers machine-guns.

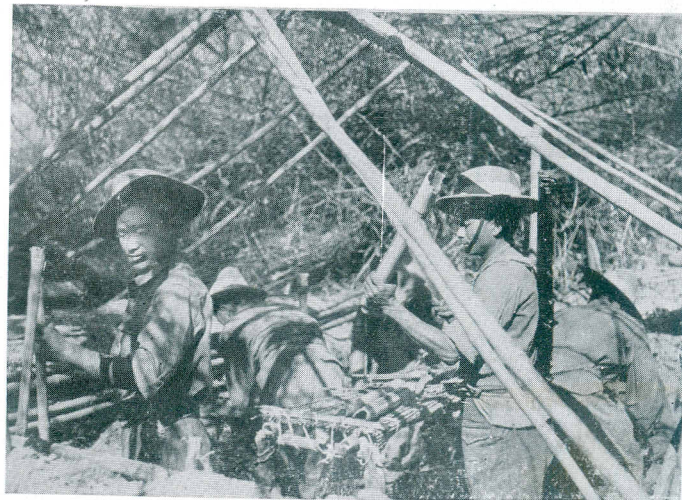
While we clung to ground on the eastern bank of the river, the Jap was doing his utmost to maintain his own pockets of troops on the western bank in order to hold up the reinforcement of the bridgehead troops, and while some Japanese slipped across the river eastwards in country

boats to the north of Kyaukmyaung, further south parties were filtering across to the western bank.

It was not until early February that the Kabwet pocket was eventually cleared up. Even concentrated airstrikes totalling 180 tons of heavy and medium bombs failed to dislodge completely the strongly bunkered enemy. But the Royal Berkshire Regiment finally liquidated this very stubborn Japanese detachment.

The arc of shattered village buildings, dusty jungle and tiny paddy fields on the east bank of the river at Kyaukmyaung became the scene of the heaviest fighting in Burma since the battles of the Imphal plain.

The enemy moved up the strongest concentration of artillery seen in the Burma war and the troops on both sides

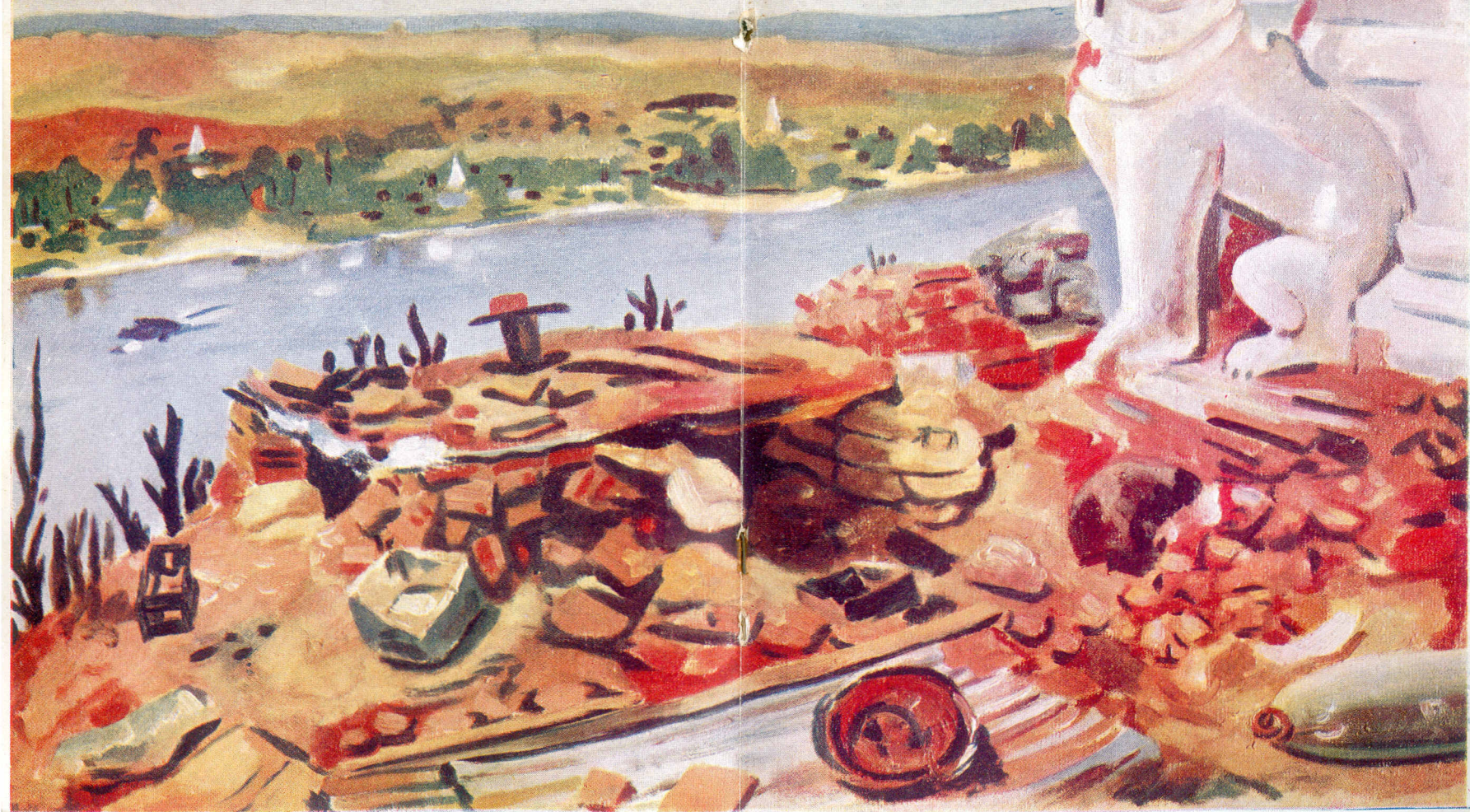


**NGAPYIN.** Jawans of HQ Company of the 1st Assam Regt. prepare bunkers to live in.



DERELICT JAPANESE POSITIONS on PEAR  
HILL overlooking the Irrawaddy.

Oil Painting by Capt. V. Metcalf,  
Official War Artist.





of the river found themselves under nightly bombardment in a crowded area packed with troops and services. Under intermittent fire during the day, the work of ferrying supplies and men across the river went on with the Sappers, the Medical and Supply services sharing the hazards of the fighting troops.

Japanese aircraft were seen too over the bridgehead areas and on one occasion the Gurkhas at Thabeikkyin were attacked by eight Oscars. Jap aircraft also made sneak raids on Onbauk airfield further west, but in the air we had an overwhelming superiority. Magnificent co-operation between ground and air developed by patient experience showed itself to the full for the first time. Medium and fighter bombers were at call to assist the bridgehead troops, by cracking open strong positions and attacking the enemy's guns. So flexible was the air-ground co-operation that on one occasion when medium bombers were already roaring towards a specified target in the Kabwet area they were diverted to deal with a party of Japs spotted by an O.P. near a large tree.

On Pear Hill and Minban Taung the Baluch and the 6th Gurkhas faced the first strong attempt by the enemy to wrest from them these positions of vantage and took a heavy toll of the enemy. The Gurkhas ambushed a party moving by night through the village of Yeshin and killed 50. Two bayonet charges on Minban Taung cost the Japs thirty more dead. Pear Hill was repeatedly attacked and nightly jitter parties followed but the Baluch stood firm.

The second major attempt of the enemy to push us back in the river came at the end of January when a co-ordinated drive in battalion strength was made by the enemy on the main portion of the bridgehead locality.

On Minban Taung there was a fierce battle, three assaults supported by field guns and medium machine-guns were made on Pear Hill and two on Ngapyin village in the centre of the bridgehead area.

Though facing heavy bombardment and savage counter-attack the bridgehead troops held firm, supported by the Divisional gunners who for two hours put down a shield of fire in front of the forward positions.

In the bridgehead area during a night which was one long roar of gunfire punctuated by the rattle of machine-gun fire and the crack of exploding grenades, doctors worked tending the wounded in their underground operating theatre, roofed with teak logs. When a chance shell put the light out and brought down a shower of earth from the roof, the doctors carried on operating by the light of a hurricane lamp.



PEAR HILL. An L.M.G. post (left) with parachutes caught by trees in the background.



By the first week in February, two days and two nights of comparative quiet told the bridgehead troops who had fought so gallantly for twenty days that the bridgehead had survived the crisis.

The Jap had lost over 1000 dead apart from wounded in his savage attempts to drive the "Dagger" Division back into the river. He fell back on the tactics of leaving behind heavily armed suicide parties to prevent the consolidation and expansion of the bridgehead. Around him were the rotting bodies of his comrades who had perished in the bridgehead battle.

The battle had been of a ferocity almost unequalled in the Burma campaign. Indian and British troops of the "Dagger" Division in their first major engagement had never wavered. Every day they braved death in moving from the small bridgehead perimeter to the outpost positions on Minban Taung and Pear Hill to steel themselves there for violent nightly counter-attack and artillery bombardment. Reliefs had to fight their way back with stretcher-borne wounded. The Baluch and the Welch, the Rajrit, the 6th Gurkhas and the Worcesters all took their turn as they were switched from sector to sector in reliefs. "Signals" worked indefatigably and communications were kept "through".

The slopes of Minban Taung and Pear Hill were a litter of wire bunkers, shell-holes, and rotting bodies. Ngapyin village, formerly a pretty little teak brown village, nestling in the midst of tall palms and studded with shining gold-topped pagodas, was battered out of all recognition, with house roofs wrecked and splintered and teak and palm trees tottering drunkenly over the village pathways.

The "Dagger" Division had not come lightly out of this battle. It had sustained many casualties. But the fighting

spirit of the men was unimpaired and reinforced now by tanks which had been ferried by night across the river to assist in the latter stages of the bridgehead battle they prepared to break out of the bridgehead and set foot on the road to Mandalay.

During the second week in February, the Rajrif and British and Indian tanks with aircraft in support added square miles of tactically important ground to the bridgehead, moving over three low lying north-south ridges pointing to the village of Kule four miles south of the main bridgehead. Kule itself was cleared by the Worcestershire Regiment in stubborn house-to-house fighting.

From the north the 4th Gurkhas could report that the area between Thabeikkyin and Minban Taung was clear of enemy.

With the invaluable aid of our tanks, the push went on down the river from Kule to Singu village, a steamer station at the head of the metalled road to Mandalay and seven miles south of the bridgehead. Singu was burning when the 6th Gurkhas entered it, and the sound of explosions during the night appeared to indicate that the enemy was beginning to destroy his ammunition dumps.

In the bridgehead area itself, enemy pockets in the jungle between Minban Taung and Kule village were given no rest.

But the Jap still had plenty of fight left. In a ten-hour battle he put in attacks on a series of strong points over a front of nearly three miles. The major force bumped the Assam Regt. holding the north-south ridges which had been seized in the advance by the Rajputana Rifles, and then split up towards intermediary strong points on the eastern outskirts of Kule village, where advanced Div. H.Q. were



## KULE, IRRAWADDY, SINGU

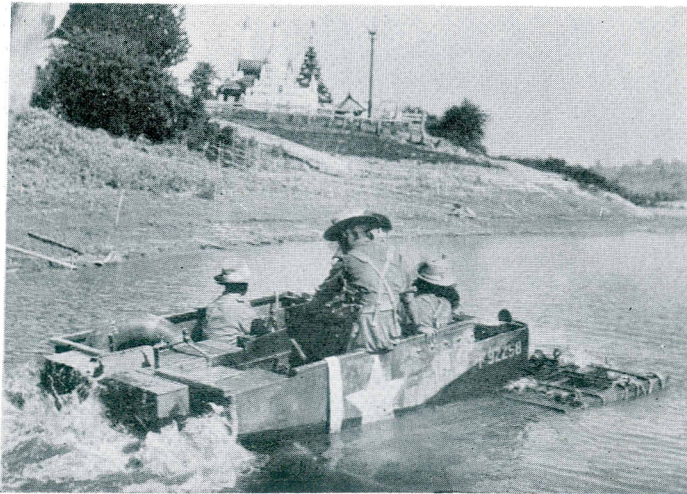
engaged. Troops on Minban Taung even had to beat back another attack.

But though the enemy made the maximum use of medium and light machine-guns and grenade dischargers he felt the lack of artillery support, having by now the use of only a few medium guns, battalion guns and mortars. The effort to hold our advance on the road to Mandalay was a failure and cost the Jap only more lives.

The battle of the Irrawaddy was now definitely going against the enemy. The 20th Indian Division were across the river opposite Myinmu having driven south to the banks of the Irrawaddy from Monywa, and calling off large forces of enemy from the defence of Mandalay. The 7th Indian Division bridgehead was across at Pagan, and the surprise thrust at Meiktila by the 17th Division's column was under way.



**BETWEEN NGAPYIN and KULE. Troops on patrol in the neighbourhood of Pear Hill.**



**A carrier-raft in action on the Irrawaddy used by Recovery Company I.E.M.E.**



**IRRAWADDY. Men of 46th Gurkha Rifles with mule transport cross one of the many streams.**

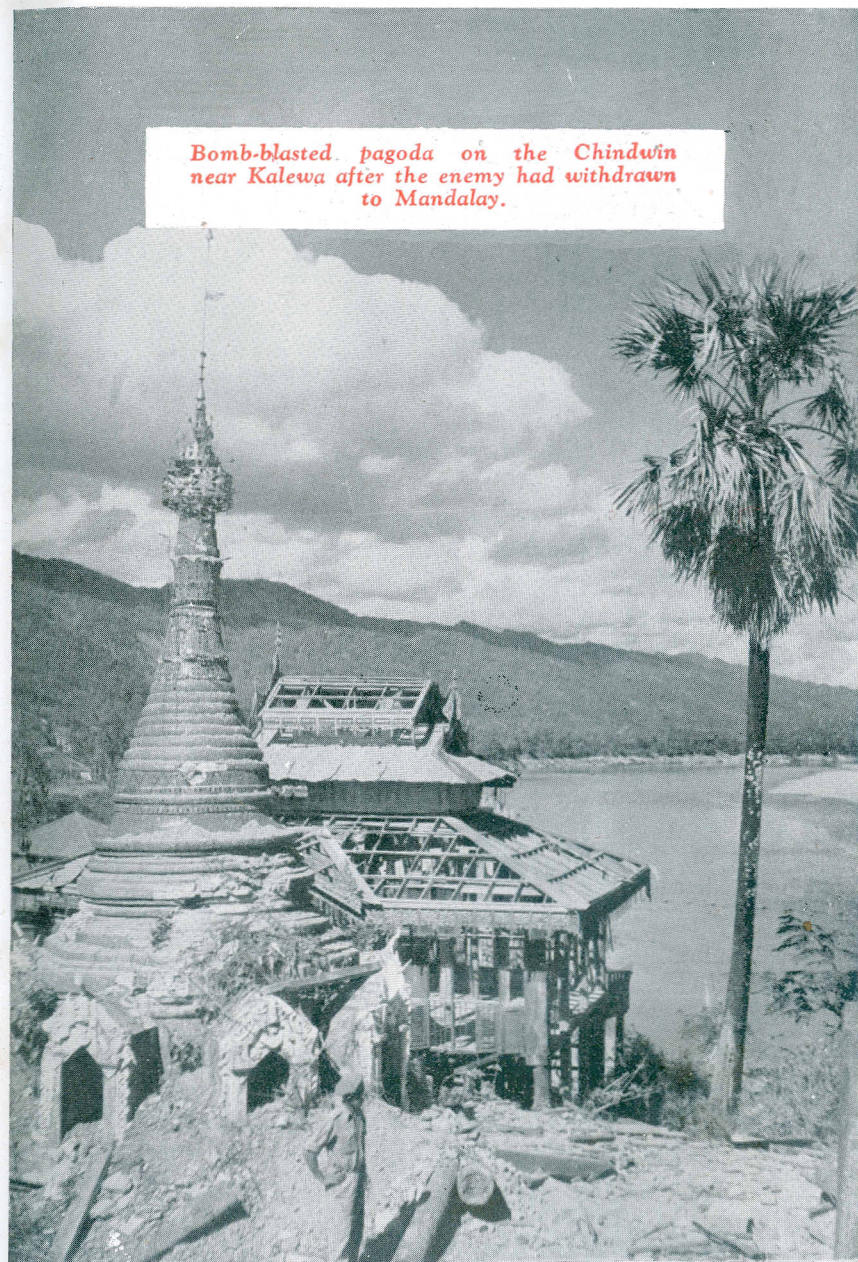




THE OTHER SIDE of the IRRAWADDY, showing troops moving up the muddy banks.



SINGU. TANK & INFANTRY co-operation. Troops go into the attack across the Irrawaddy at Singu.



Bomb-blasted pagoda on the Chindwin near Kalewa after the enemy had withdrawn to Mandalay.





MANDALAY HILL

## *Part II. Mandalay and After*

**GEN. REES** drove straight on Mandalay. It was a complex operation. Manœuvre was limited by the Irrawaddy and its maze of creeks and islands on the right flank and the outer foothills of the Shan mountains seven miles to the east. The most difficult bottleneck on the flat dusty road between Singu and Mandalay was at the point where the road passed between the Shan mountains and a huge isolated massif. Gen. Rees switched his armour there, made a swift punch, and then swinging his armour back to the right flank, smashed through the Jap suicide parties in the burning Burmese villages down the bank of the Irrawaddy on the road to Mandalay and entered Madaya from the west instead of the north.

A Jap intelligence officer who saw the spectacle of a long column of vehicles, tanks and guns surrounded by swirling dust, told his captors that he thought an armoured Division had been brought into the assault.

The 10th Baluch and the Worcesters went for the main Japanese escape routes to the east, and the Indian battalion established themselves on the southern most tip of Gawuntaung

ridge. The Worcesters advancing along the defile between the ridge of Kektu and Padu lake reached Myaungum.

On the right flank along the river, the Rajrif and the Welch cleared a score of villages along the river and a detachment of the Indian battalion made an assault landing on Kettin Island—the “St. Michael’s Mount” of the Irrawaddy.

Three hours hard fighting, after concentrated artillery fire which set the whole village ablaze, gave us Tongyi—key village on the approach to Madaya. The 6th Gurkhas crossed the creek flowing into the Irrawaddy while the Rajrif cleared the enemy from the northern bank. Jap grenadiers pelted the attacking Gurkhas with hand grenades from the tops of trees and had to be blasted out by the tanks. The Welch drove southwards further to the east of the Irrawaddy.

Madaya was entered by the Royal Berks, with Gurkhas south of the town taking heavy toll of the retreating enemy. The “Dagger” Division’s columns were now poised for the dash on Mandalay.

Gen. Rees once again used originality and daring to speed the last stage of the advance. Instead of directing his armoured thrust down the axis of the road parallel to the irrigation canals, as expected by the Japs, he formed up a “Stiletto Force” consisting of the Divisional Recce Battalion of the 15th Punjab, British and Indian tanks, Gunners and Madras Sappers.

This force swooped along the mud flats of the eastern bank of the Irrawaddy and at three o’clock in the morning of March 8th, less than a fortnight after the breakout of the bridgehead, news came to Divisional Headquarters that “Stiletto Force” had surprised the Japs and reached the north-western corner of Mandalay.



Meanwhile, the main force was rumbling down, the road south of Madaya. Japs, now completely disorganised, were everywhere, and actions were fought on ahead, on the flanks, and behind the leading battalions. The rate of killing was fantastic. Machine-gunners in the tanks had field day after field day, shooting up isolated parties of the enemy fleeing in bewilderment from our advancing columns.

On the evening of March 8th, Gen. Rees and his staff could see glistening in the setting sun, with shell bursts indicating the whereabouts of the enemy, the fabulous Mandalay Hill, studded with monastery buildings and pagodas. The prize was within his grasp.

But the Jap was to make a stand for Mandalay. They selected strong points amongst the ruined buildings from which they made our infiltration into the city as slow and as costly as possible. They held grimly on to Mandalay Hill. They prepared to defend Fort Dufferin.

But, tired though they were, our troops were determined to achieve the capture of Mandalay. A battalion of the 4th Gurkhas, after a very fine night march and scaling of the north-east end of the hill in the dark, went in with the kukri at dawn and captured the summit of Mandalay Hill.

This famous hill now became a bizarre battleground, Men of the Royal Berkshire Regiment passing through the Gurkhas, toiled up its slopes and, step by step, in close quarter fighting, drove the Japs back out of their hideouts in the monastery buildings and cellars with burning petrol and beehive charges.

Our grip round the north-east and western sides of Fort Dufferin tightened. This mile-and-a-quarter square of park land, palace, and government buildings was enclosed by a high, thick, red sandstone wall and surrounded by a 75 yard wide moat.

The Frontier Force entrenched themselves on the north and west sides of Fort Dufferin, the 4th Gurkhas on the east; they were relieved in rotations by other battalions, with close artillery support, which methodically cleared the way towards the centre of Mandalay City.

A raid to test out the defences of Fort Dufferin was carried out by the 12th Frontier Force Regiment. After bombardment, and with accompanying tanks giving heavy covering fire and concealing smoke, they stormed forward. But they could not get over the moat to storm the fort. Cleverly concealed Jap machine-guns that escaped the bombardment and tank covering fire produced a belt of fire that could not be crossed at that stage; and the Frontier Force withdrew steadily, and with great gallantry retrieved all their wounded under very heavy fire.

Immediately, measures were put in hand for steady reduction of the fort. Methods of the Napoleonic wars were blended with modern technique.

While the Sappers prepared rafts and scaling ladders, etc., the gunners got busy. From ranges of 300 down to 100 yards, six-inch howitzers and the 5.5 inch gun-howitzers manned by British Gunners, pounded the old brick walls which were 25 feet high, four feet thick, backed by a 20 feet high sloping ramp of earth 30 feet thick at the base. Slowly, and methodically breaches were made at intervals all round the fort.

Heavy and medium bombers of the RAF and USAAF flew over to help with precision bombing and rockets. By the time the siege had lasted twelve days, 25 breaches had been made, spread over the four walls of the fort.

Finally, with the knowledge that the British assault was imminent, the Japs slipped out by night, our troops lying



in wait taking due toll, and on the morning of the 20th March 1945 a white flag and a Union Jack flown on the fort walls by Anglo-Burmese prisoners who had been freed by the Jap retreat told Gen. Rees that Mandalay was in his hands. Keeping a wary eye for booby traps, sappers opened the heavy gates. Then infantry, sappers, gunners, Gen. Rees and members of his staff dashed into the fort. The two flags, the Union Jack and the "Dagger" Divisional flag (red with the golden dagger emblazoned on it) which Gen. Rees had been carrying about ready for the occasion, were run up on the flagpole, and the 1st/15th Punjab, first into the fort, also hoisted their Regimental Flag below the other two.

For Gen. Rees and the "Dagger" Division this was a great moment. By battling their way through, not only had they achieved the honour of capturing the famous city of Mandalay capital of Upper Burma, and all that it stood for, but his men also knew that Gen. Rees had personal reasons for wishing to recapture it, because, fifteen years before he had been private secretary to the Governor of Burma, and had often stayed at Government House on the ramparts of Fort Dufferin.

While the battle for Mandalay was on, Gen. Rees had made a swift swoop on Maymyo, the hill station in the Shan mountains, the summer seat of the Burma Government. For five days and nights a brigade column of the Welch, the Rajrif and the 6th Gurkhas marched along smugglers' tracks over two mountain ranges and through vertical sided valleys. The Gurkhas led the way into Maymyo, while the Welch ambushed and captured a big Jap MT convoy. Such was the speed of this swoop that the Japs were completely surprised, and those in the town took flight in a train which departed only a few minutes before the Gurkhas entered.

The population, including many Anglo-Burman internees, were thrilled to see huge Dakotas dropping supplies to the troops. Soon after, flying Jeeps—air ambulances—landed on the light airstrip and commenced evacuating the casualties across the mountains.

With the fall of Mandalay, the seizure of Meiktila, and the expansion of the 20th Indian Division bridgehead eastwards, the battle of the Irrawaddy was over. The Japs' main line of defence on the Irrawaddy was turned. He had suffered final defeat. What remained was the pursuit of his shattered armies and the drive on Rangoon.

In that pursuit, Gen. Rees with his "Dagger" Division joined. South and south-east of Mandalay his troops pursued and killed the broken enemy. An area of 25 miles



**MAYMYO. Divisional Sappers and Miners fraternise with the "locals".**



(from south of the city to the river Myitnge and across to the north-south canal at Nadaunggya) became a death trap. Many villages were the scene of bitter fighting. At Tamosko, a thousand shells from the Indian Field Regt. resulted in the total slaughter of the enemy. In a series of battles which lasted for over a week 500 Japanese including three I.t.-Cols. were killed. More than fifty per cent of the effective strength of the escaping elements had been exterminated and heavy guns and equipment had been left behind. Everywhere Jap bodies were lying, on the roadside, in the ditches, in the open paddy-fields and under trees. The land where the Japanese had come to be a master had become his grave.

The "Dagger" Division moved south and east towards weiktila, mopping up enemy parties on the way.

North-west of Meiktila in the general area of Myingyan, more than 2000 Japanese were encircled. In the Shan Hills east of Wundwin the Division commenced another battle of extermination. Every night small parties of Japanese would attempt to break out of the ring towards the Shan Hills, padding the wheels of their bullock carts and guns.

In their attempt to break out, more than 300 Japanese were killed and another 150 wounded. Vehicles and guns were captured and bullock carts loaded with supplies were destroyed.

The Division still in pursuit and aiming to cut the Jap escape routes into the Hills, turned east towards Thazi which was captured by 10th Baluch after hard fighting on the outskirts. The town formed the outer defences of Hlaingdet on the main Jap escape route into the hills.

Driven further and further east into the hills, the Japs lost Hlaingdet and took refuge in a series of hills overlooking the town. Once again "Dagger" Division took on the task of extermination.

The main battle for Burma was now over. Fourteenth Army columns had swept down the road to Rangoon, and the 26th Indian Division landing from the sea had occupied Burma's capital by the first week in May. But large Japanese forces still remained. Many of the retreating elements were concentrating in the area of the Pegu Yomas and were being joined by others from the west bank of the Irrawaddy. In the Shan Hills to the east of Toungoo the Japs fought to keep their escape route open to permit a concentration of all forces at a later stage on the east bank of the Sittang river. Many stray elements were still moving southward through the hills east of Mandalay-Rangoon road to achieve this link-up.

While British forces occupied Rangoon and rejoiced in the striking of the final blow at the enemy, the "Dagger" Division was still fighting hard on the Toungoo-Mawchi road—and fighting some of the stiffest battles of its hard fighting career, some of the toughest jungle fighting Burma had seen.

The Japanese had extensive dumps in the hills including quantities of valuable motor spares. Six miles east of Toungoo on the main Mandalay-Rangoon road, stern fighting was in progress and in the second week in May, the "Dagger" Division added to its total of enemy destroyed, a further 200 killed and 250 prisoners of war and several guns.

The Jap here, well equipped and organised, was fighting a stern and well-conducted battle. The road itself winding through hill and jungle, offered every facility for a defensive and delaying action. At every bend, the Jap sited machine-guns, which held up the advance, and were then pulled back to the next delaying point. He brought guns forward and hammered at our advancing tanks. The road was



tnickly sown with mines and road blocks were covered by skilfully sited artillery and machine-guns.

At the end of May, sometimes only making progress at the rate of a hundred yards an hour, men of the Welch Regiment were fighting up the road with tanks and Madras Sappers, who covered by tank fire, cleared mines and dealt with road demolitions.

To outflank the enemy and assist the drive up the road, "Cracker Force" was formed consisting of battalions of the Rajrif, the 12th Frontier Force Regt., and machine-gunners of the 11th Sikhs. In carrying out its mission the force killed a hundred of the enemy, faced nights of fierce attacks on their perimeter, and were finally guided back to base by a Naik, who, running the gauntlet of Jap sniper screens, picked out a route which brought the force back unharmed.

Meanwhile another column was thrusting at Kalaw—a station 64 miles east of Thazi. Operations were taken as far as Nampandet when the 10th Baluch, Gurkhas, and the Worcesters tackled the task of climbing the "Staircase" which formed the outer defences of the town. The "Staircase" serpents for four miles over a 3000 feet hill. Jap bunkers overlooked every hair-pin bend in the road.

After a week's patrolling and a day's assault the Baluch secured the "Staircase". Artillery, Sappers and tanks crept on towards Kalaw, while the Gurkhas, carrying three inch mortars and ammunition as man loads and climbing on all fours up steep-sided jungle-covered hills, marched two days to block the road ahead of the main body. The Japs were outflanked and outfought and the Worcesters in the second week in June marched into Kalaw, where the civil population had taken refuge in the jungle.

During the drenching monsoon the men of all Arms and Services of Gen. Rees' Division fought on after seven months' continuous action.

Finally in July 1945, when the last two Japanese Divisions west of the River Sittang attempted to escape in their now well-known "breakout" eastwards across the river, the 19th Division, in close co-operation with their comrades of the 17th Indian Division, and helped ably by the R.A.F. flying through the monsoon, inflicted a most crushing defeat on the Japanese in the paddyland on the banks of the Sittang. And the "Cease—fire" found 19th Division driving the enemy back along the tortuous Mawchi hill road through thick jungle towards Siam.

In this, the Burma Campaign of 1944-45 they had hammered the Japs in the Sittang Valley, and again resumed their advance eastwards to drive the remaining Japs finally out of Burma.

They had marched and fought from the Chindwin to the Irrawaddy, snatched the glittering prize of Mandalay, pursued, hounded, and destroyed the enemy south and east of the Irrawaddy line and held him at bay in his last stronghold in the mountains; Still in their ears rang the watchword of their fighting commander when they first set foot across the Chindwin in November—"Pursue the enemy".



*"Pursuing the Enemy"—see overleaf*



## PURSUING THE ENEMY



MADAYA — First entered by the Royal Berks. Above, Indian troops enter outskirts.

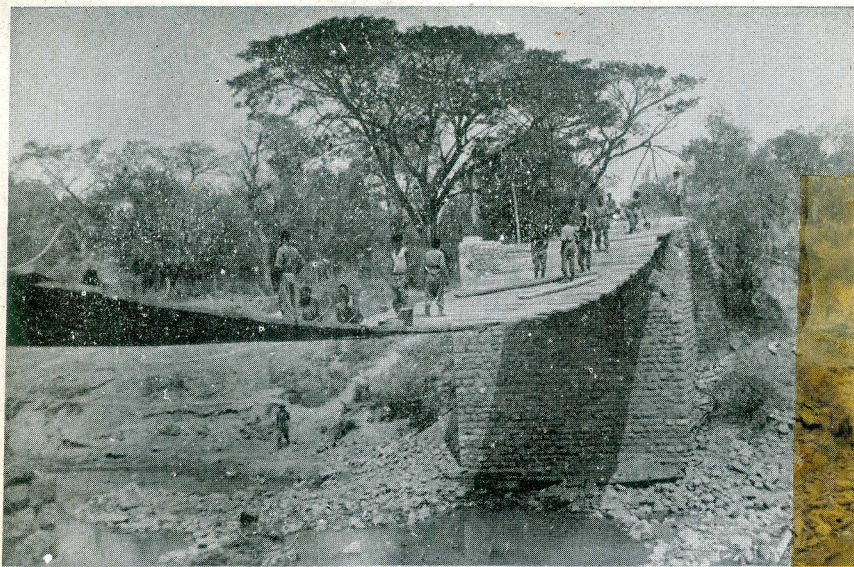


STREET FIGHTING in MANDALAY. Troops dig in for protection against sniping.



MADAYA. Troops of the Royal Berkshire Regt. pass dead Japanese as they enter the town.





**THAZI BRIDGE.** Divisional Sappers repair the bridge which lies 40 miles from Mandalay.



**TOUNGGOO-MAWCHI ROAD.** Pathans of 15th Punjab Regt. attack under smoke cover.



**ON MANDALAY HILL.** Soldier indicates target for light machine gunner.





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